Medicare beneficiary education…

Across the country, pharmacies are gearing up to help inform Medicare beneficiaries about the new prescription drug benefit. Many in the pharmacy community know the basics about the benefit: it is voluntary, all Medicare beneficiaries are eligible, on average, beneficiaries will save about 50% off of current drug expenditures; and, there is generous extra help for limited income seniors through reduced premiums, deductibles and copays. Additionally, the MMA established the benchmark for the "defined standard benefit" so we all have a ballpark feel for what the benefit might look like (http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform/newcovprescdrug.pdf). However, basic information generally prompts more questions. Lately, two of the most frequently asked questions we have been getting are: (1) When will I be able to tell beneficiaries about the benefit choices; and, (2) Are there any restrictions on what I can and can't do or say?

What they need to know now…

Plan information will not be available until after contracts are signed in September and marketing begins on October 1, 2005. Until that time, pharmacists and pharmacy personnel are relatively free to convey educational information to beneficiaries to help them understand what is coming.

CMS does not review general education oriented, outreach-type materials which contain no plan specific information. CMS has established a website for pharmacists and pharmacies (http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform/pharmacy/) to assist in this education and information campaign. Additionally, the partnerships page of our external website (http://www.cms.hhs.gov\partnerships) is very useful for general information which can be used in your outreach efforts. But please note, the partnership materials should not be altered prior to dissemination.

… and the role of Pharmacists in plan marketing

The role of pharmacists does not stop with general education. For example, many beneficiaries will want to know what plan is best for them based upon the drugs they are currently taking. Naturally, they will ask their pharmacist… and we want the trusted pharmacist to help beneficiaries understand these decisions. Additionally, pharmacies will want to tell their customers the plans in which they participate so that beneficiaries may take that information into account in making decisions about plan selection. Obviously, we do not want pharmacies or any other providers steering beneficiaries into plans based upon the financial self-interest of the provider… this would not be in best interest of the beneficiary or the Medicare program.

CMS has developed its draft marketing guidelines in an attempt to balance these interests. These guidelines, along with our regulations, speak specifically to what pharmacists can and cannot do with regard to plan marketing in pharmacies. They also provide guidance on what constitutes permitted marketing information. You can view the guidelines and the cover note by clicking on (http://www.cms.hhs.gov/pdps/PrtDPlnMrktngGdlns.asp). We are interested in your feedback on the guidelines, so please provide it in writing no later than 5pm EST, Friday, July 8, 2005 to the address listed in the cover note.

CMS Responds to "Preferred Pharmacy" Concerns

This letter outlines the safeguards that CMS has instituted to assure that preferred pharmacies do not have detrimental impact on beneficiaries (http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform/pharmacy/preferred.pdf).

Question of the Week

As a matter of current policy, providers do not pursue payment when an individual attests to his or her inability to afford copays. Under Part D, may pharmacies waive beneficiary cost-sharing? Does this cost-sharing count toward TrOOP? *(The answer references 340B pharmacies, but applies to all pharmacies).*

http://questions.cms.hhs.gov/cgi-bin/cmshhs.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_sid=vekfC2Jh&p_lva=&p_faqid=5115&p_created=1119901828p_sp=cF9zcmNoPTEmcF9ncmlkc29ydD0mcF9yb3dfY250PTImcF9zZWFyY2hfdGV4dD0zNDBiJnBfcHJvZF9sdmwxPX5hbnl_JnBfcHJvZF9sdmwyPX5hbnl_JnBfY2F0X2x2bDE9fmFueX4mcF9jYXRfbHZsMj1_YW55fiZwX3BhZ2U9MQ**&p_li=